



## U.S. Department of Justice

### *United States Attorney Eastern District of Arkansas*

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**EMBARGOED**

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### **OPERATION TIENDA HIELO NETS 52 ARRESTS, SEIZURE OF MORE THAN 100 POUNDS OF METHAMPHETAMINE ICE**

**Little Rock** – Jane W. Duke, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Arkansas, along with William J. Bryant, Assistant Special Agent in Charge of the Little Rock District Office of the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), and numerous other federal, state, and local officials were on hand today in Little Rock to highlight the results of a three-year joint drug trafficking investigation operationally dubbed “Tienda Hielo” or “Ice Store.” The investigation, which primarily focused on methamphetamine trafficking in the Batesville, Arkansas area, was initiated by local DEA agents and the 16<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Drug Task Force in mid-2005 based on intelligence gathered in numerous other investigations. According to ASAC Bryant, DEA agents became aware, through multiple sources, of a large-scale methamphetamine ring in Batesville that was distributing “ice” — which is methamphetamine having a purity level greater than 80% — from Mexico. The investigation subsequently revealed that the group was not only selling portions of the shipments locally, but was also transporting and re-distributing the drugs in other cities such as Memphis, Tennessee; Kansas City, Missouri; Des Moines, Iowa; and Indianapolis, Indiana.

Federal officials highlighted the arrests of 52 individuals in connection with this investigation. Authorities were quick to point out, however, that this figure does not include many additional defendants that were charged as part of splinter or spin-off distribution cells from the organization. When included, the number of total defendants is conservatively estimated to be in excess of 65. These splinter cases also resulted in significant other drug seizures of methamphetamine and marijuana. See attached spreadsheet for additional information as to each defendant charged in connection with Operation Tienda Hielo.

Duke stated, "Methamphetamine is a highly addictive and devastating drug. There is no way people are able to remain 'social' or 'recreational' meth users. It eventually overtakes every aspect of a person's life. We have seen case after case where people think they can use methamphetamine occasionally and still maintain a family, a career, a home, and their health. But, the addictive nature of this drug is such that you simply cannot. Eventually, the acquisition and use of methamphetamine completely consumes a user. Left in the wake are broken families, ruined careers, repossessed homes, and serious health problems."

According to officials, Interstates 40 and 30 were the primary corridors used for transporting the drugs to Arkansas. After being produced in Mexico, the drug shipments would cross the border and wind up in one of three "hub" areas—San Diego, California; Phoenix, Arizona; or Dallas, Texas. From each of these hubs, the drugs would be routed to Arkansas and, ultimately, to Independence County. On multiple occasions, the drugs were concealed within automobiles loaded on a multi-vehicle transport carrier. Once the carrier arrived in Batesville, the vehicles would be off-loaded, driven to remote locations, and the drugs removed.

"This really was a fairly savvy group of individuals," Duke stated. "Rather than transporting large amounts of bulk currency back to Mexico and risk seizure of it on the highway, they would often take the drug proceeds and buy all manner of goods locally. They would then load vehicles full of these goods and transport the goods (and any remaining currency) back to Mexico. Once in Mexico, they would sell the goods on the street, thereby converting them back to cash."

During the course of this investigation, agents seized over 100 pounds of methamphetamine ice. According to DEA reporting, the average national price for a gram of ice, which is a common user amount, rose to \$244 last year. Thus, if the drugs seized in this case had been sold in gram quantities, it would have yielded over \$11 million dollars for this particular group. Even if it had been sold in larger quantities such as by the pound, it would have grossed well over \$2,000,000.

"Fortunately, we are seeing some real progress in the war on methamphetamine," Duke said. "We see this progress firsthand through investigations like Operation Tienda Hielo. We also see this progress echoed in the national drug statistics, which reflect a rise in the price of methamphetamine, a lower number of methamphetamine seizures, and a lower level of overall drug purity. All of this tells us that we are seriously and negatively impacting the illegal methamphetamine trade." Last year, federal officials seized a total of approximately 2,770 pounds of methamphetamine. This figure represents the lowest seizure amount since 2002.

ASAC Bryant stated, "This operation was a textbook example of true multi-agency coordination. Through the invaluable assistance of our federal, state, and local partners, we have been able to disrupt and dismantle a significant narcotics trafficking organization with ties traceable to a violent Mexican drug cartel. Quite frankly, results don't get much better than this." Bryant added that contributing state and local agencies are able to equitably share in any assets

seized during the course of a federal drug investigation such as this. “That’s quite significant in this case since we have seized and forfeited over \$247,000 in assets.”

To date, the investigation has resulted in the entry of guilty pleas by 10 individuals. Numerous others have been prosecuted stateside in the involved counties. Of the three federal defendants that have already been sentenced, the lengthiest prison term imposed has been 11 years, 3 months. However, much lengthier sentences are anticipated in upcoming proceedings. Four individuals, Juan Aguilar, Edel Sandoval, Felip Valdez-Cortez, Sr., and Alfredo Martinez, remain fugitives. Many defendants face possible sentences of up to life in prison if convicted.

Numerous federal, state, and local agencies participated in this investigation. These include:

**The United States Attorney’s Office** - Eastern District of Arkansas, Assistant United States Attorneys Anne Gardner, Marsha Clevenger, and Kevin Alexander ;

**The Drug Enforcement Administration** - Little Rock District Office, Fayetteville Resident Office, San Diego and Riverside, California District Offices, Des Moines, Iowa Resident Office, and Indianapolis, Indiana District Office;

The DEA Little Rock District Office Task Force Group One, which is composed of the following agencies:

**Little Rock Police Department  
Jacksonville Police Department  
Pine Bluff Police Department and  
The Arkansas Highway Police;**

The DEA Little Rock District Office Task Force Group Two, which is composed of the following agencies:

**North Little Rock Police Department  
Pulaski County Sheriff’s Department and  
The Arkansas State Police;**

**The Federal Bureau of Investigation;**

**Immigration and Customs Enforcement;**

**The Internal Revenue Service - Criminal Investigations Division;**

**The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives;**

**The United States Marshals Service;**

**The Arkansas Army National Guard ;**  
**The Arkansas Air National Guard;**  
**The Oklahoma Bureau of Narcotics**  
**The 16th Judicial District Drug Task Force;**  
**The 2nd Judicial District Drug Task Force;**  
**The 20th Judicial District Drug Task Force;**  
**The 17<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Drug Task Force;**  
**The Central Arkansas Drug Task Force;**  
**The White County Sheriff's Department;**  
**The Van Buren County Sheriff's Department;**  
**The Independence County Sheriff's Department;**  
**The Maumelle Police Department;**  
**The Sherwood Police Department;**  
**The Jonesboro Police Department; and**  
**The Craighead County Sheriff's Department.**

See two-page attachment for specific information on individual defendants.

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ATTACHMENT TO TIENDA HIELO NEWS RELEASE

<u>Name</u>	<u>City/State</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Sentence</u>
Juan Lopez-Jasso	Batesville, AR	34	135 months
Manuel DeJesus Cabrerros-Castro	Batesville, AR	23	120 months
Jeronimo Espericueta	Batesville, AR	36	78 months
Angel Martinez	Batesville, AR	37	
Pablo Amador-Valdez	Batesville, AR	28	pled
William Keith Camp	Little Rock, AR	35	pled
Andrea Kirtley	Little Rock, AR	41	pled
Edward Radliff	N. Little Rock, AR	27	pled
Eric Leggette	Jacksonville, AR	34	pled
Jeffrey Stender	Jacksonville, AR	35	
Jackie Leach	Mt. Vernon, AR	51	pled
Morgan Lengel	N. Little Rock, AR	21	
Nathaniel Borroughs	Conway, AR	37	pled
Monty Butler	N. Little Rock, AR	33	
Andrea Oakley	Jacksonville, AR	19	
Jose Esparza-Avila	Batesville, AR	38	pled
Roldolfo Robles	Batesville, AR	37 (dismissed/state court disposition)	
Argelia Herrera-Vera	Chula Vista, CA	34	pled
Felip Valdez-Cortez, Sr			fugitive
Jesus Valdez	Indianapolis, IN	23	
Jose Garcia	Paramount, CA	23	
Christina O'Neal	Indianapolis, IN	27	pled
Juan Aguilar	Batesville, AR	24	fugitive
Edel Sandoval	Conway, AR	34	fugitive
Santiago Garcia-Pedraza	Batesville, AR	34	
Javier Cruz	Batesville, AR	42	
Paula Cruz	Batesville, AR	40	

<u>Name</u>	<u>City/State</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Sentence</u>
Lawrence Watts	Shirley, AR	26	
Lonnie Day, Jr.	Mt. View, AR	21	
Pedro Delagdo-Perez	Batesville, AR		
Jimenez Lopez	Batesville, AR		
Efrain Gonzalez Lopez	Batesville, AR		
Antonio Romero	Jonesboro, AR	33	
Jodie Davis	Jonesboro, AR	22	
Aparicio Gomez	Batesville, AR	36	
Chanqui Sanchez	Batesville, AR		
Ruben Valencia	Batesville, AR		
Clemente Uriostegui	Batesville, AR	27	
Anselmo Nava	Batesville, AR	35	
Alfredo Martinez	Mexico		fugitive
Dunia Garcia	Batesville, AR		
Freddy Bustamante	Batesville, AR		
Tomas Martinez		33	
Jorge Martinez		19	
Brandon Brokaw	Batesville, AR	21	
Huber Garcia	Batesville, AR	32	
Jose Espericueta	Batesville, AR	32	
Antonio Cruz	Batesville, AR		
Paula Cruz	Batesville, AR		
Gildardo Rodriguez	Batesville, AR		
Loyda Sandoval	Russellville, AR		pled
Hollis Brown	Russellville, AR		35 months
Sandra Brown	Russellville, AR		80 months
Leon Cummins	Russellville, AR		30 months
John Lauderdale	Russellville, AR		2 year probation
Kenneth Roberts	Russellville, AR		24 months
Randy Segun	Russellville, AR		90 months